

9.0 OPEN SPACE, COASTAL RESOURCES AND RECREATION

Note: This chapter is mostly rewritten

This chapter of the Comprehensive Community Plan contains a description of Tiverton's open space and conservation areas, and its recreational facilities, including coastal features. Opportunities for further protection and enhancement of these areas are proposed.

9.1 Existing Resources

Rhode Island and the New England region have led the nation in appreciating the value of open space and recreational resources. Since 1985, Rhode Island voters have approved many millions to be spent on the acquisition of open space and the development of recreational facilities, and Tiverton has used state matching funds for both purposes: to acquire Weetamoo Woods and to develop a new soccer field and baseball-softball field at the Town Farm. A proactive Open Space Commission works alongside the Tiverton Land Trust to tap other funding sources to acquire or protect important open space. The Land Trust has already saved 230 acres that were proposed for actual development. Both public and private interests must continue to work together to preserve open space in a carefully thought out strategy that balances open space preservation with other policy goals of the town, such as the need for housing, economic opportunity and active recreation facilities.

In 1989, the Recreation Committee prepared the Tiverton Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan, which is incorporated herein by reference. In the plan, the town accepts responsibility for providing sufficient recreation opportunities for all of its citizens. It places a priority on improving existing facilities and pursuing preservation particularly in the coastal region. The plan assisted in obtaining grants from the RI Department of Environmental Management for the development of the new recreational fields at the Town Farm, as well as purchase of the parcels that make up Weetamoo Woods. With many successful open space acquisitions and recreational developments completed, and given the rapidly changing town demographics, a review of the Tiverton Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan is necessary for planning future needs.

Several groups provide recreation programs, including the Little League and the Boy Scouts. The town employs a Recreation Coordinator to assist the Recreation Commission to expand its year round programs. The coordinator serves as liaison between public agencies and private groups for the utilization of the town's facilities.

Table 9-1 contains a listing of Tiverton's open space, conservation and recreational resources, which are also delineated in corresponding Figure 9-1. Most of the open space is in the southern portion of town, with the largest parcels consisting of Pardon Gray Preserve/Weetamoo Woods, Eight Rod Management Area and Seapowet Marsh. Most of the active recreational areas are associated with the schools. The need for open space and recreational resources continues to be greatest in north Tiverton, which has the highest population density but the least amount of available space.

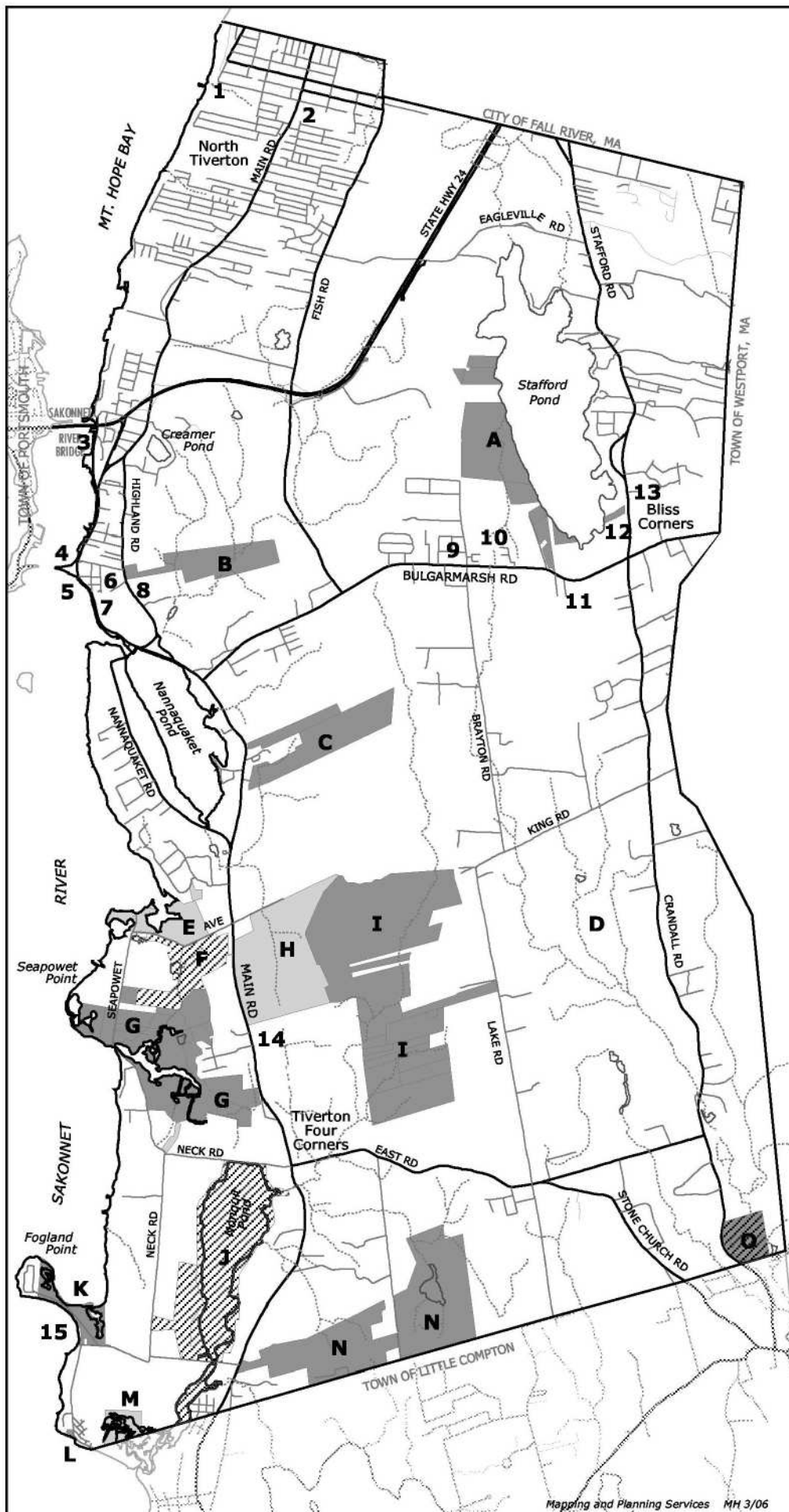
TABLE 9-1
OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION RESOURCES
(Updated 2006 – Draft)

Map			
Key	<u>Open Space and Conservation Areas</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Jurisdiction</u>
A	Stone Bridge Fire District Lots	170.8 acres	Water Authority*
B	Fort Barton Woods	80.0 acres	Town
C	Helger/Sanford Parcels	140.0 acres	Town
D	Lebreux Farm	235.0 acres	Conservation Easement*
E	Emile Ruecker Wildlife Refuge	47.0 acres	Audubon Society of RI
F	Hathaway Farm	72.0 acres	Conservation Easement*
G	Seapowet Marsh Wildlife Refuge	341.8 acres	RI DEM
H	Pardon Gray Preserve	230.0 acres	Tiverton Land Trust
I	Weetamoo Woods	541.0 acres	Town
J	Nonquit Pond Parcels	349.2 acres	Newport Water District & Conservation Easements*
K	Fogland Beach Conservation Area	45.0 acres	Town
L	High Hill Scenic Point	1.4 acres	Town
M	Fogland Marsh	90.0 acres	TNC / RIDEM
N	Eight Rod Management Area	337.0 acres	RI DEM
O	Crandall Road Lot	35.8 acres	Development Rights*
	<u>Parks and Recreation Resources</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Facilities</u>
1	Bay Street Recreational Area	2.0 acres	2 playing fields, 2 tables, tot lot
2	Pocasset School	8.0 acres	3 playing fields, 4 tennis courts, tot lot
3	Sakonnet Bridge Access**	0.1 acres	boat ramp
4	Stone Bridge Pier	0.5 acres	park
5	Grinnell's Beach	2.5 acres	5 tables
6	Fort Barton Elementary School	3.5 acres	1 playing field, tot lot
7	Little League Field	1.0 acres	1 playing field
8	Fort Barton	3.0 acres	park
9	Bulgarmarsh Grove	1.0 acres	basketball courts, skate park
10	High School and Middle School	58.0 acres	4 playing fields
11	Bulgarmarsh Recreation Area	11.4 acres	4 playing fields, 4 tennis courts, table
12	Stafford Pond Fishing Access**	0.4 acres	1 boat ramp
13	Ranger School	5.0 acres	1 playing field
14	Town Farm Recreation Area	3.0 acres	2 playing fields, soccer field, 4 tennis courts, playground, table, tot lot
15	Fogland Beach	---	8 tables, tot lot

* *Private properties whose development rights have been relinquished – no public access*

** State Owned

Source: Ocean State Outdoors; RI Outdoor Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Inventory, June 1989. Tiverton Steering Committee, 1991. **Updated 2006.**



- PUBLIC OPEN SPACE
Town, Water Districts, RI DEM
- PRIVATE OPEN SPACE
Tiverton Land Trust, Audubon Society of Rhode Island, The Nature Conservancy
- DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS SOLD or CONSERVATION EASEMENT (no public access)

See Table 9-1 for listing

Sources: RIGIS/RIDEM, TIVERTON LAND TRUST and TOWN OF TIVERTON as of 12/31/05. Tiverton Comprehensive Plan 1992, Figure 20.

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The information depicted on this map is for general planning purposes only. It may not be adequate for legal boundary definition or regulatory interpretation.

TIVERTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN



Figure 9-1 OPEN SPACE and RECREATION RESOURCES



*Weetamoo Woods was established in 1989
with a matching grant from the state of Rhode Island*

Narragansett Bay and its tributary bays including Mount Hope Bay and the Sakonnet River, provide expansive opportunities for recreational boating. The Tiverton Harbor and Coastal Waters Management Plan identifies a need for additional protected boat launch facilities. The Tiverton Harbor Commission has succeeded in the reconstruction of the public boat launch ramp at Fogland Beach, as well as the construction of the town boat landing and dinghy dock at the Stone Bridge abutment. New public waterfront facilities are part of the Villages on Mount Hope Bay development, and the Harbor Commission was a planning participant in that project. Planning for expanded public use of the Stone Bridge abutment area is also underway (see Land Use and Circulation Chapters), as well as developing more public waterfront facilities in north Tiverton.



Many of Tiverton's recreational opportunities center on its waterfront

9.2 Open Space, Coastal Resources and Recreation Goal and Objectives

Goal

Protect open space and coastal resources, and provide recreational opportunities for the citizens of Tiverton.

Objectives

- Pursue open space acquisition within a comprehensive strategy that establishes criteria and priorities, accounts for the differing needs and opportunities of the various regions of the town, and coordinates the efforts of both public and private entities.
- Protect Tiverton's farmland as valuable open space, as part of the town's cultural heritage, and as an important economic activity.
- Improve the quality and delivery of recreational programs and facilities.
- Update the Tiverton Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan along with a long-range capital program for its implementation.

9.3 Open Space, Coastal Resources and Recreation Policies

Open Space

The urgency to save quality open space has increased dramatically as the demand for new housing in Tiverton has increased. It is quite evident that Tiverton has been discovered as a desirable place to live, partly due to its accessibility to major job markets and good schools, but also because of the town's early successes in open space preservation and dedication to holding onto its rural character. However, while success in preserving open space makes the town more desirable as a place to live, it also increases the development pressure. All demographic trends point toward the critical need to preserve open space sooner, because there will be no "later." A fully built-out Tiverton is now in the foreseeable future, and each passing year increases the cost of saving open space.

While preserving open space can be costly, there may be no public expenditure that achieves more strategic goals of this plan. Consider the following:

Quality of Life

Preserving open space maintains the town's rural, maritime and scenic character by saving land, fields, trees and streams rather than permitting the town to develop into a continuum of subdivisions, stores, parking lots and malls.

Tax Burden

In addition to preserving the town's unique pastoral setting, saving open space also helps control the town's population density, thereby holding down public expenditures for schools and services, and consequently lowering the public tax burden. According to extensive studies done by the American Farmland Trust, undeveloped land costs taxpayers less than one-third of what it takes to provide services for residential developments, as indicated below:

<u>Land Use</u>	<u>Average Expenditures per \$1.00 Tax Revenue</u>
Commercial / Industrial	\$0.27
Farm / Forest	\$0.36
Residential	\$1.15

Source: *The Cost of Community Services: Making the Case for Conservation*
American Farmland Trust, 2002

Water Quality and Flood Control

Open space has direct benefits to the human population by protecting ground water recharge areas. This purifies the ground water and maintains sufficient levels to provide drinking water for approximately 40% of the town area and eliminating the need for additional publicly funded water systems. This process also reduces surface water runoff, which is very important for natural flood control.

Environmental Protection

Preserving quality open space keeps a portion of the land in a natural condition, thereby preserving habitat for wildlife and promoting biodiversity.

The selection of land for open space is a function of its availability – as undeveloped land worthy of preservation with owners willing to sell the land or its development rights, or otherwise set it aside for permanent protection. In general, however, the criteria for selecting land areas to preserve in Tiverton are described as follows:

Priority is to be given to augmenting the existing major open space areas of the town, Weetamoo Woods and the Fort Barton Conservation Area, by acquiring adjacent properties, for the following reasons:

- Their central locations makes them generally accessible from all parts of town.
- The historic connections (Fort Barton to the American Revolution, Weetamoo Woods to Native American culture and the original town settlements along Eight Rod Way) are important identities associated with Tiverton's colonial and pre-colonial history and culture.

- The existing wetlands and exposed bedrock and ledge in those areas make them less appropriate for development, thereby more economical for acquisition.
- The natural plant communities in those areas (oak/holly forest, Atlantic white cedar swamp) are documented by plant ecologists as rare forest types, which is a persuasive criterion for many funding sources.
- The interest shown by The Nature Conservancy of Rhode Island and the Tiverton Land Trust in assisting the town in funding additional open space in these specific areas.
- The natural habitat value of large, contiguous land areas is greater than an equal acreage of fragmented parcels.

Other general open space preservation priority criteria:

- The presence of rare plant/animal species or habitat.
- The presence of wetlands.
- Desirable scenic quality.
- Land that would be part of a regional greenway plan.
- The likelihood of development of a particular property that would significantly diminish the town's quality of life as defined in the Comprehensive Community Plan.
- Land that would create or enhance waterfront access or water views.
- Land that has high potential for passive recreation or educational value.

Policy 1: Pursue the preservation of open space using selection criteria and priorities as defined above.

There is a long-standing need for public open space in parts of town with high population density. Unfortunately, those very areas have little open space to acquire. Additionally, open space grants for such areas are rare because most of them are given by environmental organizations whose primary goal is the preservation of natural habitat. Nonetheless, a coordinated effort is needed between the Open Space Commission and the Recreation Commission to identify alternative sources of funding for acquiring land in high population areas that may be used for passive or active recreation.

Policy 2: The Open Space Commission will work with community groups and the Recreation Commission to identify sources of funding for acquiring open space in the more urbanized areas of Tiverton.

The establishment of the Tiverton Land Trust has greatly increased the potential for acquiring and protecting open space in the town. Private land trusts often have additional opportunities and greater flexibility in financing land protection as compared to public entities. The coordination of the efforts of the town – its officials and volunteer boards and commission, particularly the Open Space Commission – with those of the Tiverton Land Trust and other private land protection entities, will significantly enhance the preservation of open space in Tiverton.

Policy 3: The town will coordinate closely with the Land Trust and other private organizations to ensure that both public and private monies are spent for the greatest benefit in preserving open space.

Setting aside private open space is now provided for in the Rural Residential Development regulations of the zoning ordinance; such developments are required for proposed residential subdivisions within the Watershed Protection Overlay District. Management plans are also required for these open space areas. The open space that is set aside as part of a Rural Residential Development should be selected and managed in accordance with the open space protection criteria outlined in Policy 1, and in a manner that optimizes linkages with open space areas in abutting developments. To ensure this, the Planning Board (who approves all such subdivisions) shall coordinate its review of the development with the local commissions who have expertise in open space needs and environmental issues.

Policy 4: The Planning Board will require input from the Open Space Commission and the Conservation Commission in their review of proposed open space areas of Rural Residential Developments.

One unfortunate aspect of the conversion of land to housing is the loss of farmland, which affects the town's visual quality, culture and sense of place. The problem is complex, and many factors are outside the control of the town, such as the economic viability of small scale agriculture uses. However, there are existing state programs which give tax relief and offer development rights purchase to owners of agricultural land who agree to retain it for that use. Every effort should be made to promote these programs to local agricultural landowners.

Policy 5: Protect farmland through active involvement in funding programs that preserve land for agricultural use.

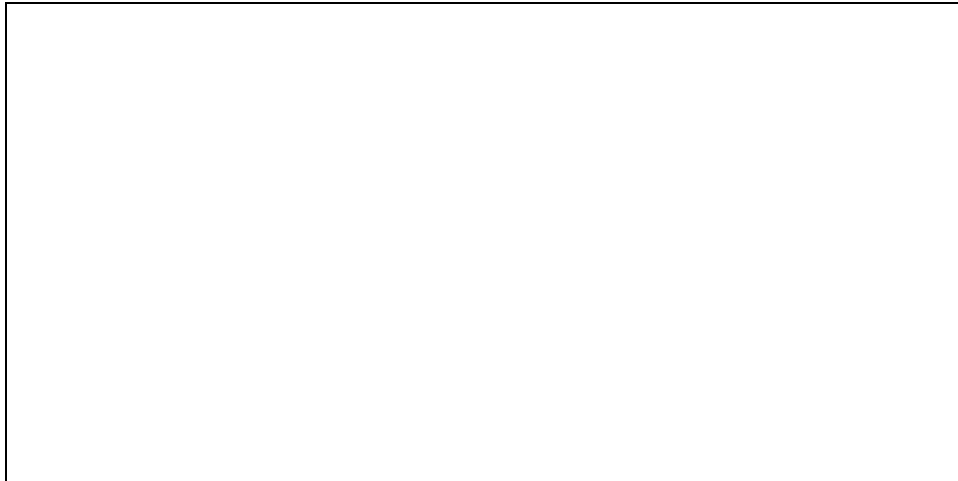
Coastal Resources

The waterfront has always played an integral part in the life styles of Tiverton residents. As with any waterfront community, public access to the waterfront has become very limited due to development and to neglect of existing rights of way.

Policy 6: The Tiverton Harbor and Coastal Waters Management Commission shall continue efforts to reclaim, maintain and acquire more rights of way to the waterfront, and to include the construction of a residential boat ramp and fishing pier.

The Newport and Old Colony Railway right-of-way represents a potential resource, both due to its public ownership and its location along Tiverton's northwestern shoreline. As various future transportation options are considered for this property, opportunities for recreational uses such as a walking trail, bicycle path and waterfront access should be incorporated into any future plans.

Policy 7: Preserve the public right-of-way of the Newport and Old Colony Railway for future recreational use, including pedestrian and bicycle use and waterfront access.



The railroad right-of-way along the Sakonnet River should be utilized as a recreational as well as transportation resource.

Recreation Planning and Programs

The Tiverton's Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan is in need of updating to reflect changes in both inventory of land and facilities, and the needs of the community since it was last prepared. The plan should also address the management and improvement of town owned properties. An up-to-date local recreation and open space

plan is necessary for the town to be competitive in the obtainment of RI DEM grants for open space and recreational land acquisition and improvements.

Policy 8: *Update the Tiverton Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan and develop management plans for all town recreation and open space properties.*

Note: The following language and policies 9-12 are taken from the original plan

Nature awareness builds an appreciation of community and the surrounding environment. Tiverton may be able to develop a nature center which tailors exhibits and programs to the local environment, and incorporates examples of the community's ecosystems. The nature center should be linked to the science curriculum of the town's schools.

Policy 9: Consider development of a nature awareness program with a public education component that can be utilized as part of the school curriculum.

School recreational facilities provide an important amenity to the community. Possibilities for expanding public utilization of these facilities should be investigated.

Policy 10: Examine expanding the utilization of School Department recreational facilities for public use.

A recreation and open space map available at the libraries and town hall would encourage use of the areas as well as build public support for open space and recreation programs.

Policy 11: Publish a town-wide map showing recreational and open space resources, picnic areas, trails and waterfront rights-of-ways.

Tiverton sports/activities programs are indicative of a common situation in American communities -- not having sufficient opportunity for teens. There are town programs tailored for the youth and early teens by private organizations such as Tiverton Youth Soccer, Schooner's Football, Little League and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. There are also programs for adults and seniors. There are, however, very few for older teens. Though the School Department offers sports, and occasional gatherings for teens, there is a need for a teen center and activity coordinator to offer more programs for teens.

Policy 12: Develop a long range plan to provide year round activities for older teens as part of a comprehensive recreation plan for all ages and population groups.